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Grace and Holy Trinity Church  
May 21, 2017  
John 14: 15-21

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This gospel seems like it is a prelude for the Feast of Pentecost, which is coming up in a few weeks. This is the “preview” of what it is that Jesus and God are promising to give when Jesus is no longer physically present among his disciples. What is really is, is a lovely re-introduction to this portion of the Trinity which has been present since before time. But in this passage it feels like something new, something different, something special just for those who love Jesus.

The Holy Spirit- Ruach- in Hebrew was present at Creation, it stirred the waters in Genesis, it was a light in the darkness for Moses and a pillar of cloud in the daylight; it is there in the still small voice after the wind dies down and after God has passed over. It inspired the prophets to preach justice and judgement. The Holy Spirit was and is to come and we understand it to be with us here now as well.

While the gift that God gives the followers of Jesus seems to take a different form in this lesson from John I am not sure that it actually does- there are images associated with the Holy Spirit as helper, comforter, advocate which are present throughout scripture. The gift which is given to those who follow Jesus is a gift that they already have, it is just a reminder that this Advocate is always there.

Although things are going to change, meaning Jesus is going to leave the disciples. They will not be abandoned. They will not be orphaned. They will not be left to fend for themselves.

Nor are we left alone, abandoned, orphaned or left to fend for ourselves when things change. Things change in our lives all the time. This is what we recognize when we accept God into our lives. We recognize that God is omnipresent and will

be with us in the changes and chances of this life. We ritualize many of these changes, it is in part why our sacraments often coincide with certain stages of life.

In each of the sacraments we invoke the name of the Trinity. In each of the sacraments we also are accompanied by one or more other Christians who act as advocates- comforters, companions, people who stand along side us at different times and in various circumstances.

Let us this morning journey together with an archetypal Christian who I will call Jane. Even though Jane is a fictional person parts of her story will hopefully sound familiar to you. This fictional follower who I have imagined I have cultivated from some of my own experience, and also stories of folks who I have known blended into this single narrative.

This is Jane's spiritual journey. Jane who as a child of God who is baptized, confirmed, married, and ordained, she is healed and reconciled to God, all the while she remained active in this Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement. But she never journeyed alone, like all of us as we walk with her today we will see the Holy Spirit accompanying her every step of the way.

When Jane was about 6 months old her parents had her baptized at Saint Swithins Episcopal Church. Her parents and Godparents made promises on her behalf. The congregation assented to help her grow in her faith. On that Sunday morning when she was baptized with water and sealed with the Holy Spirit, marked as Christ's own forever, she was accompanied by an immediate circle her parents and godparents and supported by the congregation at large.

Jane grew in age and wisdom. At the appropriate time when the priest and her parents and the Christian Education Director at St Swithins told Jane that the Bishop would be coming to receive, reaffirm and confirm individuals. Jane having completed her training in church history, polity and liturgy stood in front of the Bishop who laid hands upon her and invoking the Holy Spirit once again prayed that she be defended, O Lord, by God's heavenly grace, So that *she* may continue

God's forever, and daily increase in the Holy Spirit more and more, until *she* comes to your everlasting kingdom.

At 23 Jane graduated from a liberal arts college and had met the love of her life. She and her beloved came to the rector of St Swithin's soon after commencement and asked what they needed to do to be married. They went through premarital counseling and on a beautiful fall afternoon they exchanged vows with one another to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This sounds an awful lot like advocacy to me - spouses are intended to be our comfort and companions to be our ally in all things. This is the sacramental relationship which Jane and her husband initiated and God consecrated as they began their life together.

Time went on and Jane began to hear God calling her into a new relationship with the Church after serving on the vestry and teaching confirmation class at St Swithins she approached her rector again and asked what she needed to do if she felt like she wanted to be a deacon. The rector invited Jane to lunch and talked about the diocesan requirements for ordination to the diaconate. For the next 5 years Jane with the support of her husband completed discernment and her diaconate training. In that time they welcomed a child into their family and on her ordination day she stood again in front of the diocesan bishop accompanied by her priest with her mother, daughter and husband to affirm her calling and be consecrated as deacon in the tradition of Saint Stephen. The bishop bids her to kneel and then says the Prayer of Consecration. Even in fulfilling this extremely personal call and at this moment of ontological change Jane was not alone.

Jane served the church and her community as a faithful deacon and in the 18th year of her bi-vocational ministry she continued to serve as an accountant in her secular job she went for her annual physical. The mammogram that year showed some abnormalities. As her husband and children sat and waited with her Jane told them that she wanted to do two things regardless of the results- she wanted to reconcile herself to God and invite her supervising priest to lay hands upon her asking for

healing. Later that afternoon her colleague in ministry came to her home where they shared in the rites of confession and unction. In these Holy rituals Jane and her priest joined in prayer and seeking comfort from the Holy Spirit as is written in the rubric for after confession the Priest offered counsel, direction, and comfort. After her confession the priest laid hands upon her invoking the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus to strengthen and comfort her: granting Jane the help of God's power, that *her* sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The morning after Jane shared in these moments of Holy Advocacy, reconciliation and healing it was Sunday and as she had for almost every Sunday of her life, she and her family went to St Swithin's for the Celebration of Holy Eucharist. Instead of serving as a deacon that morning she sat in "her pew" and heard the word shared in scripture and preaching, she prayed with her fellow parishioners and joined them at the table set by Christ. As she sat during the postlude she thought of all of the times in her life when she was held up by the community of faith, and how she was never left alone.

It is hard to know that someone you don't see and don't feel and don't speak to is present in your life. It is a hard thing that we do following a messiah who we have never met in person. It is hard to believe in a God who the world denies exists more often than not. It is hard to know that the Advocate is here helping to guide protect and strengthen us- especially when we are struggling with doubt, or sin or illness or grief. So in those moments when we reaffirm our belief in Jesus, at baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage, reconciliation and unction we are accompanied by a communion of saints the same communion of saints with whom we join in the heavenly feast of Holy Communion.

We know through faith that we are never left alone. We know through action that we are a people of community, we are a people of the Trinity. We are a people who comfort and care for and accompany one another along this spiritual journey. We are people who live into the commandment which Jesus reminds us of at the beginning of today's Gospel.

We are people who live into the commandment- to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We do this because the Holy Spirit is with us all and the Holy Spirit is an Advocate for us, so we are advocates for one another.

Thanks be to God for the Advocate who is unseen and the advocates who stand beside us always.

Amen